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Transforming Information Literacy Knowledge and Skills across Practices

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Information literacy research has in recent years been inspired by practice theory, and an understanding of information literacy as a social practice has emerged. Using practice theoretical approaches research in information literacy (e.g. Lloyd, 2010; Sundin & Francke, 2009) has shown that information literacy skills and knowledge are context specific and closely related to social practices. As a consequence, the process of learning and becoming information literate is then seen as tied to specific practices and social sites of knowledge. However, if individuals develop knowledge and information skills in different ways and in different contexts, then how can we understand and analyze the possibilities and constraints related to transforming this situated knowledge from one context into another? Individuals do not solely belong to one practice at a time, but instead they are simultaneously involved in many different practices in which they engage in a variety of ways (Wenger, 1998).

The aim of this presentation is to outline a theoretical framework for discussing the possible transformation of information literacy knowledge and skills from one practice to another. Theoretically this framework takes its point of departure from a practice learning perspective (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Here knowledge is not perceived as being transferred when individuals, for example, move from task to task, but instead, patterns of participatory processes develop across various contextual settings. Knowledge is not taken to be a personal attribute, but instead individuals are seen as carriers of practices (Shove, Pantzar & Watson, 2012). To capture this movement between practices, the concept “trajectories of participation” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) is introduced initially to describe learning as a continuous process, developing both within and across practices. As individuals participate in different practices in different ways, they will develop a variety of trajectories in different directions as a result of personal and inter-subjective negotiations of meaning in social practice. Therefore secondly, the implications of transferring, transforming and recontextualizing knowledge and skills across different practices is analyzed and discussed. Finally, the theoretical framework is illustrated empirically by some brief examples taken from an ongoing research study among upper secondary school students. The study focuses on investigating the students’ development of information literacy and study competences in the transition between upper secondary school and higher education. Eight students are followed in a qualitative study during their final year in upper secondary school and their first year after joining a higher educational study program. The presentation contributes some preliminary insights into how we can understand the transformation of information literacy knowledge and skills from one practice into another. This approach might broaden our understanding of information literacy and of how individuals become information literate, and thereby also contribute to discussions of information literacy education.

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